

The Register of the Jewish Burial Society in Tetuan

Yaakov Bentolila

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

In the Jewish community of Tetuan,¹ as in other Jewish communities in Morocco, official registration of the population was not practiced. We can, however, obtain demographic and lifestyle details from private or semi-official documents, such as records of circumcisions and deaths. The Circumcisions' Book left by the *mohel* ("circumciser") R. Isaac Haserfaty, who was active in Tetuan between 1881 through 1940, is a good example of this kind of document; it is the basis of thorough research by Ana María López Álvarez,² who succeeded in extracting from a considerable number of sociological details, as not only names and dates of birth of the circumcised babies were registered, but also their parents' names and other facts about the families, such as the fathers' occupations. Such information shed light on the families living at that time in Tetuan, mainly regarding onomastics.

I will present some interesting data found in the Register of the Deceased,

¹ Tetuan was founded in the northern part of Morocco, near the Mediterranean coast, at the beginning of the sixteenth century. "Jews from Spain arrived at the same time, making the city's Jewish population overwhelmingly Sephardic. Judeo-Spanish (*Haketia*) remained the community's mother tongue into the twentieth century. Following Spain's declaration of war against Morocco in 1859, and the subsequent defeat of the sultan's forces, the Spanish army occupied Tetuan on February 6, 1860, remaining until May 1862. The Spaniards set about modernizing the city. Many of the city's Jews eagerly supported Spain's attempts at modernization, and the occupation proved an important milestone in the transformation of the Jewish community. In 1912, the Treaty of Fez established the Spanish protectorate of Morocco in the northern part of the country with Tetuan as its capital. The Jewish community grew, reaching its height around World War II. In 1940, the Jewish population reached its height of 8,058," Jessica Marglin, "Tetuan," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World* (exec. ed. Norman A. Stillman; Brill, 2010). See also Juan Bautista Vilar, *Tetuán en el Resurgimiento judío contemporáneo (1850–1870): Aproximación a la Historia del Judaísmo Norteafricano* (Caracas: Biblioteca Popular Sefaradí, 1985); Jacobo Israel Garzón, *Los judíos de Tetuán* (Madrid: Hebraica Ediciones, 2005).

² Ana María López Álvarez, *La comunidad judía de Tetuán 1881-1940: Onomástica y sociología en el libro de registro de circuncisiones del rabino Yishaq Bar Vidal Haserfaty* (Madrid: (?), Ministerio de educación, cultura y deporte, 2003)..

compiled by the Jewish Burial Society of Tetuan, called *Hevrat Huppah Eliyahu veHesed veEmet*. It covers the period from 1896 to 1987, when Moshe Bar-Asher, Yosef Shitrit and myself visited Tetuan and photographed the manuscript. The first part of the manuscript is written in *hasi-qulmos* or *solitreo*, a Rashi-like cursive Hebrew script, in an accounting notebook. I shall call it Book A (Figure 1); it registers 3,128 individuals, who passed away over the course of about ninety years. The last entry is from 5 Tishrei 5731, corresponding to October 5, 1970. Only Jewish dates are used, not the Gregorian calendar equivalents. The details specified include the given name of the deceased (though not always, as we shall see), family name and, in a somewhat inconsistent manner, other information, such as the father's name. In the case of women, the relationship to the most pertinent male in the family is specified, usually the husband or father. I have reason to believe that the number of the deceased was higher than the number registered, since the mortality rate was actually much higher in the early period, considering plagues and generally lower life expectancy. Possibly, infants and children were not registered,³ although I cannot estimate at what age registration began.⁴

נפטר		193	
5668		Haber	
17	עוד די חבלה מוגלת	1	מסקר ז' מיטל בידינו ז'נ
23	עוד די מרדכי מסין	12	שמעון ז' זיקר
27	בבולג' בבן סאטנ' יסבא	13	יוסקר ז' מיטל ז'נ
	חסד	14	הנח' אשע וידא ז' כח
17	מפ' די פ' מסק קור-אמ	16	יסקר ז' כח פ' שלח
20	9' מסק קור-אמ ז'נ		יוסקר ז' מולג
	כסל	17	מלדי די מסר כולו ש'סאמ
1	מפ' די מליו ז' דאפמ	2	יוסקר ז' מולג ז'נ
9	מרדכי מסין		(נס)

Figure 1: Book A—written in an accounting notebook

³ I did not find any record of three infants from my own family, one born dead and two who died before their third year.

⁴ In one record from 1960, a female is described as *mocita* (“little girl”), without specifying her age.

The second part of the manuscript, let us call it Book B, opens with the protocols of twenty-seven executive meetings of the society, starting from April 1935 up to July 1957. Book B is written in Spanish, in Latin script, and both the Jewish and the Gregorian calendar dates are designated. The protocols deal with various issues such as role distribution among the society members, fund raising and maintenance of the cemetery. These protocols are followed by 207 entries, each containing the details of a deceased individual (Figure 2). The first dates from July 5, 1968. The latest item in the manuscript we photographed is March 25, 1987, just five months prior to our visit. Each entry includes the name of the deceased, the date, burial expenses and the actual payment made. In some cases, the age and address of the deceased are supplied, as well as the time of death. The first fifty-nine of these entries are the same as the last fifty-nine records of Book A, From entry no. 60, there are no equivalents in Book A. Registration becomes progressively less detailed, so that by July 1978 we find just given and family names with dates of death (Figure 3).

<i>Simon Isaac Guzmán Guzmán</i>		<i>Salvo</i>
<i>Caradras</i>		<i>6 Hechvan 5730 - 18-10-69</i>
<i>5 caradras</i>	<i>3900</i>	<i>Calle Valladolid: 24 8</i>
<i>Chauffeur</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>edad 67 años</i>
<i>ayudante</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>cobrado enterrado 10.000</i>
<i>Kelím</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>cobrado vestido 10.000</i>
<i>comida</i>	<i>500</i>	
<i>1 coche</i>	<i>400</i>	
	<i>5250</i>	
<i>Vestido: 10.000</i>		
<i>Abraham Benarroch Terpat</i>		<i>Balun 1 (Amorós)</i>
<i>Caradras</i>		<i>2 Kislev 5730 - 12-11-69</i>
<i>5 pesos</i>	<i>3900</i>	<i>Calle Llueta Azulo</i>
<i>Chauffeur</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>edad 65 años</i>
<i>ayudante</i>	<i>250</i>	<i>cobrado enterrado 10.000</i>
<i>Kelím</i>	<i>700</i>	<i>10.000</i>
<i>comida</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>cobrado vestido 10000</i>
<i>1 coche</i>	<i>500</i>	
	<i>5850</i>	

Figure 2: Book B—Records of two deceased

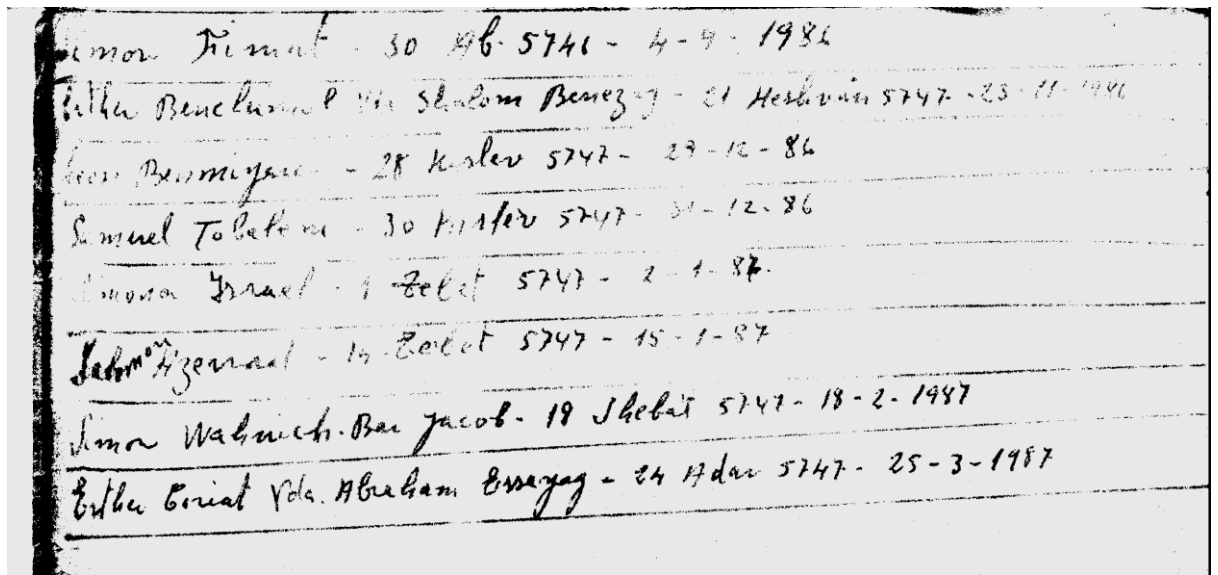


Figure 3: Last records in Book B

Since I have not yet copied all the names, I base my analysis so far on the full registration of two chronological groups in Book A:

- a) First fourteen years: 1897–1910
- b) Last nineteen years: 1953–1971.

I will refer to these two periods as “the early period” and “the later period” respectively.

In the early period, we find 660 deceased: 49% male and 51% female. In the later period, we find 564 deceased: 45% male and 55% female. The annual average in the early period is forty-seven and in the later period thirty-three. These findings (Table 1) reveal both a decrease in the population due to increased emigration in the later period, and an improvement in the conditions of health and medical care. The rise in emigration is also reflected in the higher ratio of women to men in the later period.

Table 1: Number of deceased

	Early period		Later period	
	N	%	N	%
Male	322	49	253	45
Female	338	51	311	55
Total	660	100	564	100
Average	47		33	

What I will present, then, is a comparative analysis of the early and later periods. I will begin with general comments, with data pertaining to names and orthography, and will then proceed to some sociological issues.

General comments

Given Names

The given names are in Hebrew, Arabic, or Spanish, the proportionate number of names in each language changing according to gender and period. Men from both periods have mainly traditional Hebrew names; women's names are equally distributed among the three languages, with a shift of approximately 5% from Arabic to Spanish in the later period. One innovation in the later period is the use of hypocoristic names for the women: alongside with Mas'uda (eight instances) we also find Mesody (eleven instances); we also find Frehi (for Freha), Kota and Koti (for Yaqot), Lucy, Miri (for Miriam), Raḥeli (for Raḥel), and Simi (for Simḥa). Arabic

names may be converted into Spanish equivalents, for example Mas'uda to Mercedes, Freha to Alegria, and Johar to Perla. This is prominent in the double registration of the years 1968–1970. The same person is named Mas'ud in the Hebrew entry in Book A, and Fortunato in the Spanish parallel in Book B; similarly Simha alongside Alegria.

Orthography

In both periods, the spelling of men's given names is basically traditional, יעקב, יצחק, משה (Ya'akov, Yish'aq, Moshe); occasionally in the names *Eliyahu* and *Yehuda* the *he* is replaced by *alef* אליהו → אליאו and יהודה → יאודה, probably to avoid the sequence *yod-he-waw*, used in the Name of God.

Some family names are inconsistently spelt. For example: *Abecasis* shows twice as אביקאסיס, fourteen times as אביקאציץ, four times as אביקציץ, and twice as בוקאסיס; *Azerrad* is spelt five times אזיראד, twice אזירד, and three times אזירראד;⁵ *Waknin* is spelt וואקנין twice, וואקנין twice, וועקנין once, ועאקנין once, בואקנין once, and בואקנין 3 times. The spelling of *Ajuelos* is twice אג'ואלוס, once אג'וואילוס, once אוג'ואילוס, once אז'וואילוס, and once אלוואילוס, in a record from 1900, where the shift ž → χ reveals a recently adopted Hispanic pronunciation.⁶

Cases of *plene* spelling in the early period include סעדייא, עיזיר, עאזאר (Sa'adya, 'Azar, 'Ezer), and in the later period האנאנייא, תאמאר, הליל, שלומה, אברהם (Abraham, Šelomo, Hillel, Tamar and Hananya). Writing becomes increasingly sloppy with time, both in terms of calligraphy and orthographic consistency. For example, the name

⁵ Double *resh* (רר) is a common spelling in Judeo-Spanish documents from North Africa, either to render the Spanish /rr/, or to represent a geminated [r] in words of Arabic origin.

⁶ This shift is evidenced as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, possibly earlier. Our records show it frequently in words like מוכ'יר and היכ'ה ("wife" and "daughter"). However, finding it in a personal name reflects the progress of the Hispanization that took place in the community.

Jimol [Žimol]⁷ is inconsistently spelled: ג'ימול → ג'מל, גמל, ג'מול, גמול, ג'ימול, גימול; likewise Miriam: מ'רים → מ'ריין, מ'רייאם, מ'רייאם. It seems that the scribes of the later period were no longer bound by the traditional orthography of Hebrew and Ladino. They alternate between Yehuda with *he* (five times) and Ye'uda with *alef* (four times), and they are not consistent with the use of the diacritic apostrophe for *pe* [f], *kaf* [χ] and *gimel* [ž , tš].

Onomastics

Among the aspects of onomastics that deserve attention, I would like to point to the family names used in the community. The comparison between the ranking of the twenty most frequent names in the works of López Álvarez⁸ and in ours, shows a remarkable resemblance, as can be seen in table 2. Fourteen names appear in both lists. The six names that appear in one column only are displayed in bold italics.

⁷ In Judeo-Spanish documents from North Africa, the letter 'ג, *gimel* with an apostrophe, renders the sounds [ž] or [tš]. The phone [dž] is not used, as opposed to the Ottoman Judeo-Spanish, where 'ג stands for [dž] or [tš], and 'ז, *zayin* with an apostrophe, for [ž]. See David M. Bunis, *Judezmo, An Introduction to the Language of the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University 1999 [Hebrew]), 53.

⁸ *Supra*, fn. 2, 322. In Table 2, I changed the spelling used by López Álvarez to the commonly used system.

Table 2: the most frequent family names

N of deceased (both periods)		N of circumcised (1881–1940)	
Name	N	Name	N
Hacohen	61	Chocron	159
Chocron	50	Benzaquen	130
Halevy	46	Hacohen	119
Benzaquen	42	Bentolila	118
Nahon	41	Halevy	77
Bentolila	35	Nahon	73
<i>Benchimol</i>	28	Serfaty	66
Garzon	27	<i>Abitbol</i>	54
Benarroch	25	Benarroch	52
Abecasis	22	Garzon	52
Serfaty	22	Israel	51
Israel	20	<i>Acrich</i>	47
Sananes	19	<i>Benatar</i>	44
Serruya	19	Sananes	40
Azulay	18	Serruya	40
<i>Benhamu</i>	18	<i>Benassayag</i>	38
<i>Bensadon</i>	18	<i>Wahnich</i>	38
<i>Gabay</i>	16	Abecassis	36
<i>Hachuel</i>	16	Azulay	35
<i>Jalfon</i>	15	<i>Wahnon</i>	35

Titles, appellatives and nicknames

Rabbis are named with the ר' (רבי = *Rebbi*) title, some with the distinguishing מוה"ר (= הנכבד וחשוב כבוד הרב) הנו"ח כה"ר (= מורנו הרב = *morenu harav* “Our guide the Rabbi”);

hannixbad veħašuv, kevod harav “The distinguished and notable, his honor the Rabbi”); *haddayyan rebbi* “the judge Rabbi”); *heħaxam rebbi* = “the erudite Rabbi”). Other honorific appellatives are *hazzaqen* “the ancient”), once *hazzeqena* “the ancient” [fem.]), *Hermana*, “sister” in Spanish), used to honor (mostly old) women with special religious or social qualifications; the masculine counterpart *Hermano* is also, used, but rarely. The acronyms ז"ל (*ziḡrono livraḡa* “of blessed memory”) and ע"ה עליו השלום (= *alav haššalom* “may peace be upon him”) are used only with rabbis’ names; נוחו עדן (= *nuħo ‘eden* “May he rest in Paradise”) is used for the name of a deceased husband in female records. A small number of individuals are designated according to their roles in the community: two as *ħevri* “member of the Burial Society”), one as *šammaš* “maintenance man of a synagogue”), and one as ש"ך (*šex* [Arabic] “person in charge of public affairs in the Jewish quarter”).

Some occupations are specified—with the Arabic term: *nidžar* (ניג'אר “carpenter”), *zailaži* (זאיילאג'י “tile-setter”), *ħaddar* (ħaddar “vegetable merchant”), *ħudra* (ħudra “vegetable [merchant]”), *ħudrero* [Spanish morphology] *idem*); or with the Spanish term: *médico*, “physician”), *sastrero* (*sastre* “tailor”), *platero* “silversmith”), *ferrero* (Judeo-Spanish *ferrero* for Spanish *herrero* “blacksmith”), *cerrero* (J-Sp *cerrero* for Sp *cerrajero* “locksmith”), *molino* “mill” for “miller”), *lata* “tin” for “tinsmith”), *café* for “a dealer in coffee or the like”), *lotería* “[who sells] lottery tickets”), *carbon* “[who sells] coal”).⁹ Most professions are inscribed in the records of the earlier period; the sellers of lottery tickets and coal, as well as the tinsmith, are the only ones recorded in the later period.

Outsiders are designated by their origin: *erbatí*, “from Rabat”), *tanžawi* [Arabic] and *tangerino* [Sp.] “from Tangier”), *araiši* [Ar.] “from Larache”), *araišito*, *idem* with a Spanish diminutive suffix), *de šešwan* or *šešawni* “from Chauen”), *šešawnia*, *idem* fem.), *rifea* “from the Rif mountains” fem.), *forastero* “outsider,” as Judeo-Arabic speakers were called in Tetuan), *de Oran* “from Oran”).

⁹ Notice the way of naming things to signify occupations.

A few records include nicknames:¹⁰ ג'וּחָה (*Žoħa* [mas.])¹¹ “a well known schemer from popular tales”,¹² לה מדייא (*la media*, ambiguous – “the half [fem.]”?/“the sock”?),¹³ לה ויסטוזה (*la vistoza* “the exhibitionist” [fem.]).

Sociological comments

Omission of women’s given names in the early period

A prominent phenomenon in the early period is the high percentage (33%) of omission of women’s given names—the deceased woman is only referred to in relation to the most significant male relative: husband, son, father, brother, or even nephew. The syntactic pattern is מוכ'יר די/אשת/מאדרי די/היכל'ה די/בתו של פלוני “wife/mother/daughter of X (male’s name).” In the later period, female given names are no longer omitted, but the relationship to the significant male relative is still specified in most cases: 81%.¹⁴ Significantly, for the majority, this relationship is designated with the Hebrew term אשת, בתו של, אלמנת (“wife, daughter, widow”): 78% as against 54% in the early period (Table 2). This, alongside a

¹⁰ Nina Pinto-Abecasis has done research on nicknames in the Community of Tetuan. Among her most important findings is the relevance of humor and gender. See: Nina Pinto-Abecasis, *Humor in Nicknames among the Jews in Tetuan* Doctoral Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 2008 [Hebrew]; *idem*, “Nicknaming Patterns Among the Haketia Speaking Jews of Tetuan,” *Ladinar V* (2009 [Hebrew]), 89–137; *idem*, “‘Ja Ja Ja’ and ‘The European’ – Gender in Nicknaming Among the Jews of Tetuan”, *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore XXVI* (2009 [Hebrew]) 87–110.

¹¹ This (from 1960–61) is the only nickname recorded in the later period. In the early period we find a woman (from 1906–07) related to *Žoħa*: *Reina la de Žoħa* (‘*Žoħa*’s *Reina*’); there must have been another person with the same nickname, which means that every generation had its own *Žoħa*; see next footnote.

¹² On the personage of *Žoħa* among Judeo-Spanish speakers in Morocco, see Gladys Pimienta, “*Djoha en haketia*,” *Aki Yerushalayim* 76 (2004), 34–38; on *Žoħa* in oriental Judeo-Spanish tales, see Tamar Alexander-Frizer, *The Beloved Friend-and-a-Half* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1999 [Hebrew]), 357–69.

¹³ In the present day, a century later, it is impossible to understand the motivation for these nicknames. Were they based on the bearer’s body, her appearance, her personality? See Pinto-Abecasis, *Humor in Nicknames*, ch. 3, sect. 4.

¹⁴ In this case the syntactic pattern is: “Y (female’s given name), wife/mother/daughter of... X (male’s name)”

consistent use of the full word בן *ben* instead of its traditional Moroccan abbreviation ה' *nun* (Table 3), seems to reflect an emergent acquaintance with Modern Hebrew and a growing interest in the recently established State of Israel.

**Table 3: Linguistic terms for the naming of women
in relation to a male relative**

Language of terms	Early period		Later period	
	N	%	N	%
Spanish	151	46	56	22
Hebrew	178	54	196	78
Total	329	100	252	100

Table 4: Use of the full word *ben* instead of its traditional abbreviation

	Early period	Late period
Abbreviation/full	ה'	בן
Example	ה' מירגי	בן מירגי
Transcription	N' Mergui	Ben Mergui

Double family names in the later period

The non-Jewish Spanish pattern of two family names—the father's followed by the mother's—was widely used by men and women in the Jewish community of Tetuan, especially in later years, in direct proportion to the consolidation of the Spanish

influence.¹⁵ This practice appears in the records of the later period only, occasionally (in 9% of the cases) with respect to the names of men.¹⁶ According to the Hispanic custom, almost half of the married women are registered with two family names, their maiden name and their husband's name.¹⁷

Bachelors and spinsters

Individuals who had never married were consistently described as *bahur* “young man” or *betula* “virgin.” In the later period, twenty-nine individuals were registered in each of these categories (including two *betulot* aged eighty and ninety). In the early period, however, the ratio of bachelors to spinsters shows thirty-eight “young men” as against fifteen “virgins” (Table 4); these are always designated as “daughters of,” following the custom we have already seen—relating the deceased female individuals to a male kin. We may probably attribute the rather low ratio of *betula* designations to the fact that girls were married at a young age: when deceased at a very young age they were not registered at all,¹⁸ and by the time a girl was old enough to be registered, she was already old enough to be married.

¹⁵ On Spanish influence, see *supra* fn. 1.

¹⁶ For example: Shelomo Nahon Marrache.

¹⁷ For example: Freha Cohen, widow of Rebbi Shemuel Bentolila.

¹⁸ See *supra* ftns. 3 and 4.

Table 5: Widows, bachelors and spinsters

	Early period		Later period	
	N	%	N	%
Widows	7	2	159	<u>51</u>
Wives	201	59	59	<u>19</u>
Bachelors “ <i>bahur</i> ”	38	12	29	11
Spinsters “ <i>betula</i> ”	15	4	29	<u>9</u>

Widows

In the early period only seven women were described as “widows,” as opposed to 159 in the later period. We may assume that in the early period, the number of widows was actually higher, but they were described as mothers, daughters, etc. “Widow” connotes an independent status, whereas a woman in the early period was predominantly defined in relation to her male kin.

The difference between the early and later periods also reflects a demographic change: many of the young people emigrated from Tetuan to Israel, the Americas and Europe, leaving the elderly behind. This process is reflected in the drop in the number of women described as “wives of”: 19% in the later period, as against 59% in the early period. In the entries of Book B, where the age of the deceased is mentioned in ninety cases, a relatively old society emerges (Figure 3).

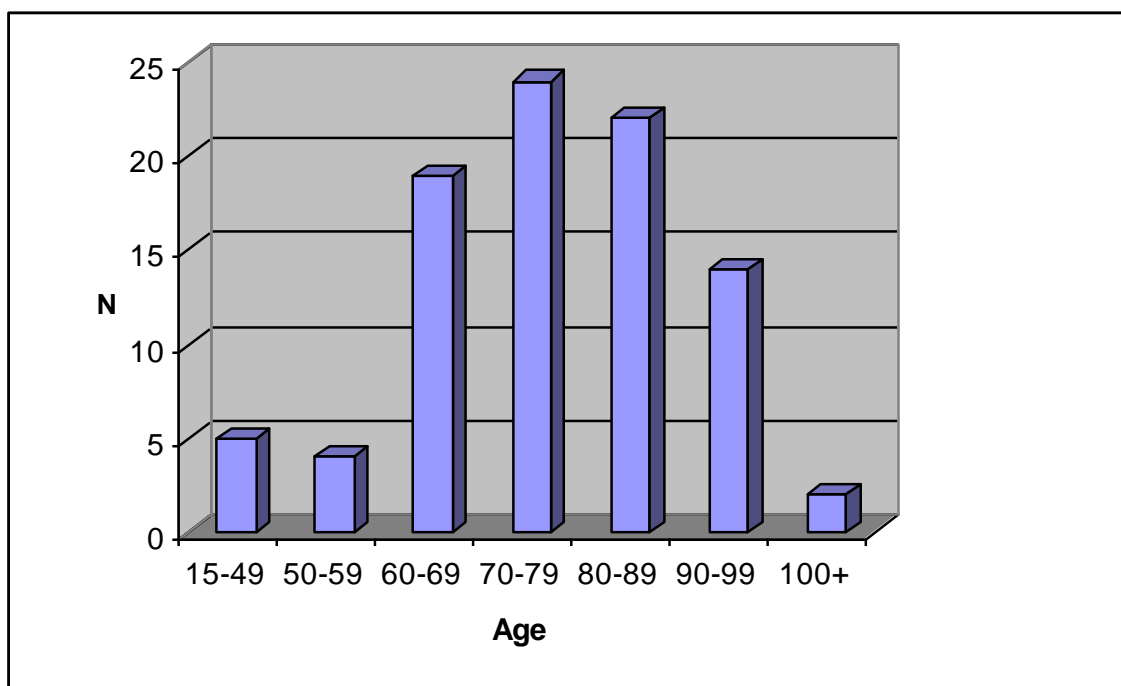


Figure 4: Number of deceased by age in Book B

To summarize

A close look at the lists of deceased persons sheds some light on the evolving lifestyle of the community of Tetuan during the last century. A comparison of the early and later periods shows a developmental path characterized by the following elements: an improvement in sanitation and medical care; a weakening of the ties to the linguistic tradition of the community along with an accelerated process of Hispanization; an emerging attraction to Modern Hebrew; an improvement in women's status, and an increase in emigration, leaving the older generation behind. This process has left almost no Jews in Tetuan.